

CONFERENCE PAPER 3

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Heavy marketing of energy-dense nutrient-poor foods around public basic schools in Greater Accra region, Ghana

Gideon S. Amevinya¹, Wilhemina Quarpong¹, Akua Tandoh¹, Richmond Aryeetey¹, Stefanie Vandevijvere², Charles Agyemang³, Michelle Holdsworth⁴, Francis Zotor⁵, Matilda E. Laar⁶, Kobby Mensah⁷, Phyllis Addo¹, Dennis Laryea⁸, Gershim Asiki⁹, Daniel Sellen¹⁰, Bridget Kelly¹¹, Amos Laar*¹

¹Department of Population, Family & Reproductive Health, School of Public Health, University of Ghana, Legon, Accra, Ghana.

²Sciensano, Service of lifestyle and chronic diseases, Brussels, Belgium

³Department of Public & Occupational Health, Amsterdam UMC, University of Amsterdam, Amsterdam, Netherlands.

⁴French National Research Institute for Sustainable Development (IRD), NUTRIPASS Unit: IRD-Univ Montpellier-SupAgro, Montpellier, France

⁵Department of Family and Community Health, University of Health and Allied Sciences, Ho, Ghana

⁶Department Family and Consumer Sciences, School of Agriculture, University of Ghana, Accra Ghana.

⁷Department of Marketing & Entrepreneurship, University of Ghana Business School, University of Ghana, Legon, Accra.

⁸Non-Communicable Disease Programme, Ghana Health Service, Accra, Ghana

⁹African Population and Health Research Center, Nairobi, Kenya

¹⁰Department of Nutritional Sciences, University of Toronto, Toronto, Canada.

¹¹Early Start, School of Health and Society, University of Wollongong, Wollongong, NSW Australia

*Correspondence: alaar@ug.edu.gh

Introduction

The marketing of energy-dense nutrient-poor food products is common in obesogenic food environments¹. The extent of marketing within surroundings where children live and play has the potential to influence their food choices². We examined the extent and nature of marketing of foods, alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages around selected schools in Ghana's most urbanized region, the Greater Accra region.

Methods or approach

Basic schools (n =200) were selected using a multi-stage systematic sampling approach in six randomly selected districts of Greater Accra region – as part of the Measurement, Evaluation, Accountability, and Leadership Support for NCDs Prevention Study (MEALS4NCDs)³. This cross-sectional study assessed outdoor advertising around the selected schools using an adapted protocol from the International Network for Food and Obesity/Non-communicable Diseases Research, Monitoring and Action Support (INFORMAS)⁴. All outdoor advertisements (of food and non-food products) – within 250m road network distance from the entrance of all selected schools were mapped. For each food advertisement, a pre-designed tool, was used to enter information—including setting, type and size of advertisement, number of food products in the advertisement, and promotional techniques used. Digital photographs and GPS coordinates of all food advertisements were also collected. All advertised food products were classified and assigned to three major groups: core/healthy foods, non-core/unhealthy foods and miscellaneous based on the INFORMAS protocol.^{4,5}

Results Findings and interpretations

A total of 5,887 advertisements were identified in the areas surveyed around the schools; 41.9% of these advertisements were for food. The majority (48.7%) of the food advertisements were small in size (>A4 paper but <1.3m x 1.9m). Advertisements were prevalent at food outlets (77.9%) and in other settings - along roads and on buildings. Promotional characters were included within 13.5% (334/2469) of all food advertisements; cartoons/manufacturer's characters 69.2% (231/334) were the most dominant. About 8% of all food advertisements (184/2469) had premium offers including price discount and gift/collectables. Overall, 70.2% of food advertisements were classified as

unhealthy 11.5% as healthy, and 14.3% as miscellaneous. Sugar-sweetened beverages (34.5%) was the most frequently promoted food product category. There were on average (standard deviation) 12.70 (13.03) food advertisements classified as unhealthy per school.

Conclusions

There is an abundance of unhealthy food advertisements around public basic schools in Accra. Policies and actions are needed to protect pupils from such marketing practices.

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